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# The Mongoose is loose

*Largest operation since Anaconda sends soldiers into caves after enemy*

**By Sgt. Ed Zink**  
109<sup>th</sup> Mobile Public  
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KANDAHAR AIR FIELD, Afghanistan – Coalition Task Force soldiers continue the hunt for Taliban fighters and their weapon caches as Operation Mongoose, the largest offensive operation since Operation Anaconda last year, enters its second week.

Troopers from the 504<sup>th</sup> and 505<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiments of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division are currently scouring caves and searching villages near the town of Spin Boldak, which borders Pakistan about 60 miles southeast of here, for signs of further enemy activities.

"The operation is going as we thought it would and according to plan," said Lt. Col. Rick Trietley, executive officer of the 504<sup>th</sup> PIR Devils.

It wasn't officially named until Thursday, but Operation Mongoose began Jan. 27 when at least 18 Taliban fighters were killed after firing upon AH-64 Apache helicopters in the Adi Ghar Mountains near Spin Boldak. Later that day two people on a motorcycle and carrying AK-47 assault rifles were engaged by U.S. forces. One individual was killed and the other captured. The captured individual told military personnel that at least 80 Taliban were in the caves among the mountains.

That information sparked missions by the Quick Reaction Force here and soon, hundreds of Coali-



Sgt. Ed Zink

Soldiers from 2nd Plt., Co B, 2nd Bn, 504th PIR clear a cave in the Adi Ghar Mountains near Spin Boldak during Operation Mongoose, Tuesday.

## Space shuttle explodes

*7 astronauts killed; NASA begins investigation*

**NBC, MSNBC AND NEWS SERVICES**

JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, Texas — With the nation watching in grief and horror, NASA began the gut-wrenching process Saturday of trying to find out why the space shuttle Columbia plummeted to Earth in flames in central Texas, taking the lives of all seven astronauts aboard. Officials all but ruled out terrorism almost immediately and said the first indication of trouble was the loss of temperature sensors in the left wing.

The crash was the first fatal accident in America's space program since the 1986 explosion of the Challenger, which also claimed seven lives. That disaster grounded the shuttle fleet for almost three years and raised deep questions about the risks of space flight.

"The Columbia's lost," President Bush told the



Photo by Reuters (Handout)

**The Space Shuttle Columbia streaks across the sky as it breaks into pieces, Saturday. All seven aboard were killed.**

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# From the top —



## Grappling with tragedy

During our second week here, there was a memorial ceremony for Sgt. Steven Checo, a 1<sup>st</sup> Bn., 504<sup>th</sup> PIR soldier who was killed in action. Sunday, there was a memorial ceremony for the four soldiers who were killed in a helicopter accident at Bagram. Then a wave of unbelief spread as news about the Space Shuttle accident became known.

Struggling to make sense out of it is not an easy task. Wondering why events like this happen brings little comfort. When John the Baptist was killed, a direct result of Jesus' mission,

Jesus withdrew to a solitary place, but he had little chance to mourn. The crowds came and he taught them. His heart must have been broken, but his compassion for the living and importance of the mission pushed him on.

Here in Afghanistan, soldiers are placed in situations which are potentially life threatening. Death may occur, as the events of last week have shown. Soldiers should grieve, and remember their fallen comrades, but often are afforded little time to do so.

Like Jesus, you may be forced to mourn on the inside because the demands of the mission will push you on.

Chaplain (Maj.) Jeffrey D. Watters  
Task Force Devil Chaplain

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## Off the record ...

## Where were you when the Challenger exploded?



"I was in the field in Fort Hood, Texas."

Travis Martin  
Laborer  
Brown and Root Services



"I was at home and saw it on TV."

Capt. Kyle Moulton  
Executive Officer  
Co. C, 27th Eng. Bn.



"I was in the first grade watching it on TV."

1st Lt. Tamara Archuleta  
HH-60 Pavehawk Pilot  
41st Expeditionary Rescue Squadron



"I was at Fort Bragg in the 319th Field Artillery Regiment."

Sgt. 1st Class Clawson McNeill  
Air Traffic Control Tower Chief  
Co. B, 1st Bn., 58th Avn.



**MONGOOSE** from page 1 \_\_\_\_\_

tion Task Force soldiers were on the ground searching and clearing caves and villages.

Soldiers found evidence that wounded fighters had been kept in the caves, military officials said. They also found mules and stockpiles of ammunition, fuel, food, water and blankets.

Trietley said that once caches are found they must be cleared and destroyed so they cannot be used again by the enemy.

"It's a long, arduous and dangerous process," said Trietley.

Trietley said that although information indicates that most of the enemy forces in the area have fled, Coalition Task Force soldiers are still on their guard.

"We have to maintain vigilance there and make sure we take the proper security measures," said Trietley. "But, at this point we are really focusing on identifying the caves and caches and taking steps to make sure the enemy can never use those again and deny them sanctuary along that area on the Pakistani border ... As long as that takes, we'll be down there."



Sgt. Ed Zink

**Lt. Col. Charles Flynn, commander of 2nd Bn., 504th PIR, center, communicates with his ground forces as they search caves in the Adi Ghar Mountains close to Spin Boldak during Operation Mongoose, Tuesday.**

**SHUTTLE** from page 1 \_\_\_\_\_

nation in a brief, emotional address he delivered after rushing back to Washington from Camp David, Md. "There are no survivors."

Although "our entire nation

grieves," said the president, who ordered that flags be flown at half-staff through Wednesday, the astronauts' deaths will not spell an end to space exploration.

"The cause in which they died will continue," he said. "Our journey into

space will go on."

NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe said Columbia broke up in flames as it re-entered the Earth's atmosphere, spreading debris over hundreds of miles of Texas, just 16 minutes before the 100-ton shuttle was to have landed at Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

Columbia's crew members completed more than 80 scientific research experiments during their time in orbit. O'Keefe described them as having performed their mission brilliantly and said in a broken voice, "The loss of this valued crew is something we will never be able to get over."

As investigations began, an official of the Department of Homeland Security told NBC News on condition of anonymity there was no indication that terrorism was involved.

Not even the Defense Department's fledgling space-based anti-missile system is advanced enough to reliably intercept an object as small as the shuttle flying 18 times the speed of sound more than 200,000 feet above the Earth.



Sgt. Ed Zink

**Low rider**

**AH-64 Apache helicopters set a uniform horizon as a CH-47 Chinook helicopter sillouettes itself against the sunset over Kandahar Air Field, Afghanistan, Saturday.**

# DEVIL SPORTS\_\_\_\_\_ (from ESPN.com)

## Will the real Lakers ever stand up?

**By Peter May**

Special to ESPN.com

FRIDAY, Jan. 31 — I believe it was the Kingston Trio who once lamented, "I know 500, don't sound like much." They were referring to bail money to get out of the Tijuana Jail.

The modern-day interpretation would be this: "It isn't much, but it's all we can hope for right now." The speaker: Phil Jackson. Or, perhaps this: "Playoffs? You're talking about playoffs?" The speaker: Allen Iverson.

How can it be that we are at the end of January and the three-time defending NBA champions are still three games under .500? Wasn't their terrible, Shaquille O'Neal-free start (3-9, with Kobe Bryant filleting his teammates) going to be a faded memory once the Big Reversal arrived on the scene? Weren't the

Los Angeles Lakers going to then go on a march where they mercilessly took names and numbers and soon found their way, at least past the Warriors, Rockets and Suns?

Hasn't happened. (OK, two out of three ain't bad. They are one-half game ahead of those feisty Warriors.) The Lakers remain tantalizingly close to that magical .500 mark, but a loss tonight to the Kings, or a loss in any of their next four games, assures that they will be a sub-.500 team at the All-Star break.

Hey, the news isn't all bad. Forbes Magazine thinks the Lakers are still the most valuable franchise in pro basketball — although much of that is based on the fact that the Lakers have a lot of sellouts in the playoffs, when the already altitudinous ticket prices are jacked even higher. But .500 might not even get the Lakers to the playoffs; the No. 8 team in the conference is four games over .500.

And then there's former Knicks coach Jeff Van Gundy, who is now an analyst for Turner Sports as he awaits his next calling. While working the Mavericks-



Phil Jackson, right, admits that his Lakers might not be that good after all.

Timberwolves game on Wednesday, Van Gundy said that neither Shaq nor Kobe deserved to go to the All-Star Game because the All-Star players should come from winning teams. How's that for a major diss? (Zydrunas Ilgauskas could not be reached for comment.)

Seriously, there still are plenty of games left (39 for the Lakers) to get their act together. You would have a hard time, maybe even an impossible time, finding anyone who doesn't think that somehow, some way, these guys will do what it takes to at least get into the playoffs. (That alone indicates how times have changed.)



**Pvt. Murphy's Law** by Mark Baker

***You might be Airborne if ...  
everytime you see a red light turn  
green your chin automatically goes  
to your chest. — John "Doc" Horton  
(from Paratrooper.net)***